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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 27th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Wednesday, 12 June 1991, at 3 p.m.

President: Mr. JASINSKI (Poland)
(Vice-President)

later: Mr. PIRIZ-BALLON (Uruguay)
(President)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

SPECIAL PROGRAMMES OF ASSISTANCE (continued)

(a) AFRICA-RELATED MATTERS (continued) (DP/1991/L.5; DP/1991/16, 17 and 18)

(b) LEAST DEVELOPED COUNTRIES (DP/1991/19 and 61)

1. Mr. RADE (Netherlands), speaking on behalf of the 12 States members of the European Community, said that recent political developments in Africa and the democratic changes that had occurred in a number of African countries had opened up new possibilities for the continent. In view of the clear relationship between development and human freedom, those changes should be encouraged in order to promote development in Africa from within. The human development index showed that there was a clear linkage between the level of human development and the budgetary choices made by Governments. The Twelve wished to encourage Governments to make the right budgetary choices and were prepared to support developing countries in their efforts to promote human development.

2. Although resource flows to Africa had declined during the period 1986-1990, UNDP had nearly doubled the resources it allocated to Africa. A further substantial increase was expected during the fifth cycle. The Twelve welcomed that development in view of the continuing fundamental problems experienced by African countries.

3. The Social Dimensions of Adjustment (SDA) project addressed the social costs of structural adjustment processes and the need to take them into account in formulating structural adjustment programmes. The Governing Council would have to agree on certain changes in that project, since there was room for substantial improvements in its management.

4. The Twelve agreed that the economic recovery and development of Africa required a longer time-frame than traditional three-year adjustment programmes allowed. The National Long-Term Perspective Studies and Programmes (NLTPS/P) could provide a useful socio-economic framework to guide policy reform and investment programmes. UNDP should provide information on the state of preparation of the Studies and Programmes. The Twelve welcomed the figures provided in document DP/1991/16 on the increased use of African experts in general and of African female expertise in particular and agreed with the need to address the emerging priority gaps in technical assistance (para. 64). In view of the structural weaknesses in most African countries and the problems facing them, it was imperative for African countries to pursue sound national policies and for the donor community to increase its support to those countries. UNDP had a special role to play in that regard.

5. The development of sufficient transport and communications systems throughout Africa was an important objective for both African countries and

(Mr. Rade, Netherlands)

the donor community. The Twelve welcomed every attempt to enhance the coordination of efforts to make improvements in that area. If the Second United Nations Transport and Communications Decade in Africa could make a useful contribution in that regard, the Community would certainly welcome it. More attention should be paid in the context of the Decade to the environmental aspects of the transportation problem and to the need to give priority to developing less costly means of transport.

6. The Twelve stressed the importance of the Second United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries and the need for UNDP to integrate fully into its activities the main elements of the Programme of Action adopted at the Conference. They welcomed the intention expressed by the Administrator to request resident representatives to include the Programme of Action in their discussions with the Governments of LDCs on fifth cycle country programmes. They felt that the follow-up to the Programme of Action envisaged by UNDP was adequate and stressed the need to streamline coordination mechanisms for LDCs. It was of the utmost importance to strive for a better coordinated aid effort in those countries, which generally lacked human and institutional resources.

7. With regard to the strategies for human resources development, the Twelve welcomed the assistance to be provided by UNDP in that respect to the Governments of LDCs. It would be possible to achieve satisfactory human resources development only if the relevant policies and programmes formed part of a broader approach which included population policies, health services, education and training. Since part of the IPF resources allocated to LDCs would be substantially increased in the fifth cycle, the Twelve wondered whether it would in fact be appropriate to consolidate the Special Measures Fund for the Least Developed Countries (SMF/LDC), which had provided useful services but did not have an identifiable role to play in view of the enlarged country IPFs for LDCs. In that connection, he stressed that ongoing projects and programmes financed by the Fund should be executed as originally planned.

8. Mr. LOUP (UNDP Coordinator of Assistance to the Least Developed Countries), introducing the report of the Administrator on the Special Measures Fund for the Least Developed Countries and the role of the United Nations Development Programme in the follow-up and implementation of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the 1990s (DP/1991/19) said that the central recommendation of the report was that it should be a priority for UNDP to strengthen the capacity of LDCs to manage their economies and coordinate the external assistance that they received from the international community. UNDP had been guided by the findings of the report in preparing its proposals with regard to both the Special Measures Fund and the UNDP role in the follow-up to the Paris Conference.

(Mr. Loup)

9. In recent years, UNDP had endeavoured to direct SMF/LDC funds towards priority sectors where additional resources could ma e a difference in enhancing development efforts by LDCs. Those attemp s had thus far failed to elicit a positive response from the donor community. UNDP had proposed to concentrate the resources of the Fund on strengthenin the economic management capacity of LDCs. However, the Fund's principal sup orters had recently made it known that they no longer wished to contribute to the Fund, their main reason being that UNDP would be allocating 55 per cen of IPF resources to the LDCs during the fifth programming cycle. If the Cou cil decided to discontinue the Fund, the necessary steps would be ta en to phase it out.

10. Since the Paris Conference, UNDP had initiated a number of steps to implement the Programme of Action. It was now propos ng to focus on the question of improving aid coordination in LDCs and th need to strengthen the policy analysis and economic management capabilities of those countries. Those would be the main priorities for UNDP technical cooperation with the LDCs in the years to come.

11. Mr. KOIKE (Japan) said that his delegation suppo ted the further strengthening of UNDP activities in priority fields i Africa, with the allocation of resources estimated at some 50 per cent of total IPF resources over the fifth programming cycle. He noted with sati faction the establishment of the Steering Committee of the United Nations Programme of Action for African Economic Recovery and Development 986-1990 (UNPAAERD) as a coordinating mechanism, the reorientation of country nd regional programmes towards UNPAAERD during the fourth cycle, the impleme tation of activities and programmes by special funds, and the launching of spe ial initiatives.

12. Although sometimes painful, the structural adjus ment policies being carried out by most African countries were vitally im ortant to their efforts to achieve long-term development objectives. His del gation hoped that the Social Dimensions of Adjustment (SDA) project would c ntinue.

13. Japan was pleased that recognition of the need f r a long-term framework for African development had led to a number of initia ives, including the National Long-Term Perspective Studies (NLTPS) and th African Capacity-Building Initiative (ACBI), which should be igorously pursued. Capacity-building in such areas as policy management nd aid coordination deserved special attention since it was essential to chieving self-reliance. UNDP activities in that field should be well-coordina ed and mutually reinforcing. His delegation was pleased to note the ncreasing participation of African consultants and non-governmental organizat ons in the development of African countries. Success in promoting national xecution had not been great, however, and national capacity-building effort should be strengthened. That could be done only when Governmen s had the requisite political will and received strategic assistance from UNDP. His delegation

(Mr. Koike, Japan)

urged the Programme to give priority to supporting such efforts in allocating its human and financial resources.

14. Japan would make every effort to help the least developed countries (LDCs) attain their development goals in a spirit of partnership between developed and developing countries. In order to achieve tangible results with limited resources, the Governments concerned must set realistic policy goals with clear priorities and concentrate available resources on attaining them. Assisting LDCs in nation-building continued to be the biggest task facing the international community in the 1990s. His delegation welcomed the Administrator's statement that UNDP would be guided by a strategy that recognized its responsibility to concentrate UNDP resources on support for the specific development needs of LDCs.

15. Japan had steadily increased its assistance to African countries and least developed countries and was now the largest donor to LDCs. In 1989, on a net disbursement basis, his country had provided aid totalling $1.6 billion. Japan had also increased its contribution to multilateral development organizations and was now the second largest contributor to the African Development Bank from outside the region and the largest contributor to the African Development Fund. It was also the largest bilateral contributor to the special programmes of assistance for low-income, debt-distressed, sub-Saharan countries. Significant progress was being made towards democracy and participatory development in Africa. Japan commended the countries concerned and intended to increase its cooperation with them.

16. Mr. BURLEY (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)) said that the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the 1990s was a strong expression of strengthened partnership, shared responsibility and mutual commitment by the LDCs and their development partners to arrest and reverse the deterioration in the socio-economic and ecological conditions of those countries. The Programme of Action called for a strengthened and expanded country review process. UNDP round tables and World Bank consultative groups would continue to be the backbone of the process of implementing the Programme. The Paris Conference had emphasized the need to organize country review meetings on a regular basis to provide sustained momentum for the development process and improve aid coordination.

17. The Paris Conference had also emphasized the need to link arrangements at the country level to those at the global level. UNCTAD was consulting with UNDP and the World Bank on ways of ensuring the implementation of the Programme of Action and on cooperation and exchanges of information between UNCTAD and those agencies in the follow-up process. The major themes of UNDP policy were reflected in the objectives of the Programme of Action. That augured particularly well for strengthening cooperation between UNCTAD and UNDP in implementing the Programme. UNDP would contribute to UNCTAD activities relating to the global-level follow-up, particularly the

(Mr. Burley)

preparation of annual reports on LDCs. UNDP field offices in LDCs would provide relevant socio-economic information for the UNCTAD country-level database. UNCTAD would increase its contribution to UNDP round tables and provide inputs through the UNDP resident representatives in LDCs on implementing the Programme of Action at the country level. UNCTAD and UNDP would conduct joint, action-oriented studies on issues of direct concern to UNDP in implementing the Programme of Action. He shared the Administrator's view that the Special Measures Fund for the Least Developed Countries would be crucial as a catalyst for promoting activities such as the preparation of human development strategies, the strengthening of aid coordination and other efforts essential to the implementation of the Programe of Action throughout the 1990s. Lastly, he stressed that an effective partnership between LDCs and their development partners should produce an international environment supportive of sound domestic policies.

18. Mr. BORJA DE MOZOTA (France) said he wished to add a few remarks to the statement made on behalf of the Twelve by the representative of the Netherlands.

19. Africa's gloomy economic prospects made urgent decisions vital. The primary responsibility for initiatives to ensure equitable growth lay with African countries themselves: many were already discharging that responsibility and should be given international support in order to promote growth, particularly in the agricultural sector. The developed countries should work to reduce the major obstacles to development and adopt a coherent approach to helping the developing countries resolve their difficulties, particularly with respect to debt and external trade. Meanwhile, the United Nations, and UNDP in particular, should maintain its special programmes for Africa.

20. The fact that UNDP resources for Africa had doubled during the fourth programming cycle was to be welcomed. If yet further improvements were to be made in meeting Africa's technical cooperation needs, NaTCAP activities should be expanded, as should multi-bilateral initiatives. His delegation supported activities designed to accelerate the process of rationalizing the objectives and activities of the various intergovernmental organizations working for African economic integration. Technical cooperation in the area of transport and telecommunications should also be further developed. Programmes for the integration of women in economic activity should be extended to more African countries, and UNDP should make deliberate use of the services of female, and particularly African female, experts. With regard to the United Nations Programme of Action for African Economic Recovery and Development 1986-1990 (UNPAAERD), UNDP's view that priority should be accorded to Africa for longer than a mere three-year cycle deserved endorsement. However, it was necessary to adopt programmes which were more specific and better defined and to ensure that their funding was stable.

(Mr. Borja de Mozota, France)

21. For the least developed countries (LDCs), the nagging problem of debt required new initiatives. His delegation would continue to advocate new joint measures on the part of creditor countries in order to ensure a continued and increased flow of funding to the developing countries. In particular, official development assistance (ODA) should be maintained with a view to attaining the objectives agreed on by the international community as rapidly as possible. Trade was also of particular importance, and it was to be hoped that the successful conclusion of trade negotiations would open up new prospects for the developing countries in the framework of a strengthened multilateral system. However, the essential problem for many developing countries related to commodities, and their efforts to increase their competitiveness and diversify their economies must be supported. His delegation hoped that the efforts made in that connection by the European Economic Community would be matched by its principal partners in the developed world. Thought must also be given to ways of transferring more technology, on more favourable terms, so that LDCs could exercise increased control over their development.

22. Mr. SALES (Mozambique) expressed the hope that UNDP support for Africa would be maintained or even increased in the years to come, especially in connection with the continuing implications of UNPAAERD. Existing initiatives should be pursued, including the NaTCAP exercise and the Social Dimensions of Adjustment (SDA) project, which involved the preparation and production of vital data on the social sector and should be accompanied by broad interaction among the various parties concerned in order to facilitate the integration of social concerns and the elaboration of concrete action plans. The SDA project should be provided with sufficient resources and expanded to cover other interested African countries.

23. National execution was of critical importance for general progress in national capacity-building and the achievement of self-reliance in technical assistance. The active interest of the Regional Bureau for Africa (RBA) in practical measures supportive of national execution in a number of African countries was therefore welcome and should be extended to other interested countries. His delegation also noted the important work done by UNDP resident representatives at the field level in the area of emergency assistance, but believed that RBA could pay more attention to the linkage between emergency and development issues and might wish to intensify its consultations with other UNDP departments in that respect.

24. His delegation welcomed UNDP's participation in multi-bilateral initiatives and expected the forthcoming cluster meetings of ministers to provide impetus for closer cooperation and dialogue between African countries and UNDP. The meetings might also provide an opportunity for discussion of interesting suggestions concerning the use of Special Programme Resources (SPR) in support of UNPAAERD.

(Mr. Sales, Mozambique)

25. In conclusion, his delegation regretted to note that one of the Paris Declaration's important provisions no longer enjoyed recognition.

26. Mr. GATHUNGU (Kenya) said that the work of UNDP in Africa, particularly through the NaTCAP process, was of crucial importance. His country would soon be applying to participate in that process, which it felt contributed to African countries' efforts to improve technical cooperation with donor countries.

27. His delegation hoped that UNPAAERD would undergo a profound and detailed review. The initial response to the Programme of Action had been less than adequate: African countries had done their best, given their current economic difficulties, and it was to be hoped that other partners in the Programme would respond more actively in the future. The international community should provide sufficient resources to help African countries in the difficult task of implementing structural adjustment programmes.

28. Mr. FERNANDEZ (Observer for Liberia) endorsed the comments made by the representative of Kenya concerning UNPAAERD. Noting the many fundamental weaknesses of the SDA project reported in paragraphs 7 and 15 of document DP/1991/17, his delegation found it odd that the Administrator should request a strengthening of UNDP's capacity to perpetuate an error. To proceed as recommended would be catastrophic for the Programme's development assistance in Africa. It had been agreed that UNDP should be strengthened to perform the functions for which it was best qualified and to maintain its neutral character: it was therefore difficult to understand why UNDP, which had far fewer resources at its disposal than the World Bank, should contribute much more to the SDA project than the Bank.

29. The decision, during the Gulf crisis, to forgive one African country's $3 billion debt suggested that the time had come for some rethinking. More detailed consideration should be given to the African Alternative Framework to Structural Adjustment Programmes for Socio-Economic Recovery and Transformation. As the process of democratization unfolded in the continent, it would be increasingly difficult to pursue structural adjustment in its current form.

30. Mr. MAHBUB (Observer for Bangladesh) said that the social and economic situation of the LDCs had, on the whole, deteriorated during the 1980s. The success of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the 1990s, adopted at the Second United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, depended on the effectiveness of national policies, the allocation of additional resources and a strengthened partnership based on mutual commitments.

31. In the light of the recommendations of the Second Conference, as well as of Governing Council decision 90/51, the Administrator had proposed that the Special Measures Fund for the Least Developed Countries (SMF/LDC) concentrate

(Mr. Mahbub, Observer, Bangladesh)

on strengthening capacities related to socio-economic policy analysis and economic management, while helping to improve the aid coordination capacity of LDCs and promoting activities such as the preparation of human development strategies. His delegation was, therefore, extremely disappointed by the almost total lack of resources committed to SMF/LDC for 1991, as noted in paragraph 4 of document DP/1991/19, and strongly urged donors to contribute more generously. It also hoped that donors would respond to the call to increase contributions to the United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) by 20 per cent each year until the end of the decade, in accordance with the provisions of the Programme of Action.

32. While appreciating the Governing Council's decision to allocate 55 per cent of IPF resources to LDCs over the fifth cycle, his delegation believed that additional funds were required from other sources. It hoped that UNDP would continue to play an important role in the follow-up and implementation of the Programme of Action and urged it to further strengthen its links with UNCTAD, which had been designated by the Second Conference as the focal point for such follow-up.

33. Mr. MISSARY (Observer for Yemen) said that his country, the product of a recent happy amalgamation between two former Member States, faced many problems in merging two different economic and social structures. As the only Arab-Asian LDC, it noted the important role which UNDP must play during the coming decade in supporting the development needs of LDCs. While fully convinced that the LDCs themselves were responsible for the development of their economies, it also recognized the need for assistance from outside: in its own particular case, involving a transition to democracy and the establishment of a market economy, it needed assistance from organizations and countries in assuming the additional very heavy burdens placed upon it. It placed particular hope in the Programme of Action adopted at the Second United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries.

34. His delegation endorsed all the recommendations contained in document DP/1991/19 and hoped that SMF/LDC would fulfil its new mandate for the 1990s in accordance with the recommendations of the Second United Nations Conference. It also joined other delegations in recognizing the importance of private initiatives concerning the debt of LDCs and hoped that the next session of the General Assembly would generate further progress in that direction.

35. Mrs. DUDIK GAYOSO (United States of America) welcomed the efforts of UNDP to design and launch several new initiatives and programmes in support of structural adjustment and policy reform. RBA had clearly been correct in recognizing the consensus which had emerged during the term of UNPAAERD between the African States and their donor partners and, subsequently, in reformulating its traditional technical assistance programmes into activities more relevant to current priority requirements. The cluster meetings which it sponsored had also served to build a useful consensus. The Structural

(Mrs. Dudik Gayoso, United States)

Adjustment Advisory Teams for Africa (SAATA) the SDA project, the National Long-Term Perspective Studies (NLTPS) and the African Capacity-Building Initiative (ACBI) were all particularly relevant and potentially valuable efforts, deserving continued support over the next few years.

36. Her delegation looked forward to the final appraisal and review of UNPAAERD in September 1991. While UNDP should continue to concentrate its efforts on support for structural adjustment and policy reform initiatives, it seemed unlikely that an effort so broad-based and unfocused as that of UNPAAERD was appropriate for the years to come. African Governments, their donor partners and UNDP now needed to agree on the most appropriate and effective ways of ensuring that the best results were achieved from the resources allocated. In that respect, the round tables and consultative groups in which UNDP participated remained an important element of the coordination process not only for Africa but for all developing countries, and especially for the LDCs. Her delegation strongly supported the recommendation that UNDP should develop a "mission statement" and prepare with each country a strategy for building the capacity of LDCs to manage development resources.

37. Tremendous difficulties had arisen in implementing the proposal adopted eight years previously whereby economists should be recruited for RBA and selected field offices. It would be useful to receive a status report from the Bureau on how those difficulties were being overcome.

38. Noting the value and importance of the two evaluations of the Transport and Communications Decade in Africa, her delegation encouraged UNDP and African Governments to follow their recommendations. Investment in human capital to maintain existing transport systems would help substantially to spur economic growth and social development. Any UNDP projects for the Second Decade must contribute to the building and strengthening of national capabilities to plan, implement and coordinate transport and communications programmes, taking due account of the environmental consequences. Her delegation endorsed UNDP's plans to help strengthen the Pan-African Telecommunications Union and other related African organizations with a view to entrusting them, in the future, with responsibility for implementing and coordinating programmes. It also encouraged UNDP to make every possible effort to establish cost-sharing arrangements with multilateral banks or NGOs for projects and programmes in connection with the Second Decade and to ensure that its projects were coordinated with those organizations. In view of the decentralized approach being adopted by National Coordination Committees and subregional groups, UNDP must ensure that it not only provided technical assistance when needed but also closely monitored progress towards attainment of the Second Decade's reformulated objectives.

39. Noting that UNDP had been judged guilty of inadequate supervision of the SDA project, her delegation considered that the evaluation report might provide a useful opportunity for Member States to re-examine UNDP's role in the United Nations system in the light of that performance. Such a review

(Mrs. Dudik Gayoso, United States)

could provide a useful basis for the formulation of guidelines concerning the implementation of thematic activities, particularly poverty alleviation, to be financed from SPR. The first general conclusion to be drawn from the evaluations of aid coordination, SDA and NaTCAPs was that capacity-building at the level of national policy and programme planning and coordination should be a central concern of UNDP, rather than continuing to be addressed in a piecemeal fashion. Accordingly, UNDP resident representatives should be responsible for the overall management of capacity-building assistance at the country level, no matter how such assistance was financed. It was only at the country level that issues of sustainability and linkages between various parts of a Government's policy-making apparatus could be adequately addressed.

40. Her delegation saw the NaTCAP and SDA programmes as complementary elements of the UNDP-led effort to strengthen the policy capacity of Governments, particularly in the LDCs. It also saw aid coordination capacity as a further aspect of a Government's ability to formulate and implement national policies and programmes. It therefore agreed that UNDP must take the creation of self-sustaining institutional capacities for the management of development as the guiding mandate for its programmes in the LDCs. UNDP would also need to develop a conceptual framework for assisting LDCs to formulate and implement appropriate institutional development strategies. It would be useful to know how UNDP planned to meet that challenge.

41. Noting that both the NaTCAP and SDA evaluations urged UNDP to focus its efforts on long-term institutional development rather than on household surveys or macro-economic management, her delegation agreed that UNDP's comparative advantage lay in the area of human and institutional development. It considered, however, that long-term institutional development and structural adjustment were complementary processes. The evaluations were also correct in advising that UNDP should involve the specialized agencies as full partners in the formulation and implementation of institutional development and poverty alleviation strategies, but the agencies would have to modify their traditional approaches to technical cooperation in favour of greater emphasis on building self-sustaining institutional capacity. Given UNDP's lack of in-depth expertise in interdisciplinary areas such as policy analysis, administrative reform and economic, financial and environmental management, it would probably benefit from close cooperation with the Department of Technical Cooperation for Development (DTCD) in those areas. Such cooperation should include participation in the development of capacity-building concepts and techniques and in the design and evaluation of capacity-building assistance activities in DTCD's areas of expertise.

42. The recommendation that UNDP assist the Governments of least developed countries in designing strategies for human resources development was an excellent idea. In following up on the Second United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, UNDP's priority role should be to assist in the development of national capacity to manage development programmes and coordinate external assistance. Strategies for human resources development

(Mrs. Dudik Gayoso, United States)

should address human development in the broad sense, taking account of population growth, addressing health and education needs and increasing opportunities for employment in productive enterprises.

43. She wished to know what UNDP's plans were for following up on the World Conference on Education for All in the Africa region.

44. Mr. Piriz-Ballon (Uruguay) took the Chair.

45. Mr. DAMIBA (Assistant Administrator and Regional Director of the Regional Bureau for Africa) said that UNDP, in agreement with African countries, had begun to translate the Human Development Report into action. First of all, it was establishing a human development profile by country. Secondly, it was developing a human development strategy and implications for each country, within which the National Long-Term Perspective Studies and Programmes (NLTPS/P) offered a useful frame of reference for defining long-term strategies. The third element consisted of refining statistical projects so that data could be collected which would ensure preparation and follow-up of a programme embodying the human dimension of development.

46. The steering committee for the Social Dimensions of Adjustment (SDA) project had met in Paris on 18-19 April with some of the African countries and donors. Its recommendations included the following: the project must not be centred in the capitals and headquarters of development or cooperation institutions but should be focused on countries; UNDP must not be the executing agency but must become the manager of a collective dialogue; the statistical system developed during the first phase of the project must be simplified to permit the rapid design of social development programmes; the strengthening of local capacities should become a priority; and modalities of execution should include giving an important role to other United Nations agencies.

47. The project was not being financed by UNDP alone, although the Programme had contributed $5 million during its first phase. UNDP was developing a new project for the fifth programming cycle which would permit the strengthening of social development capacity in Africa.

48. UNDP had been asked to play a leading role in the NLTPS/P project and was creating a consultative group of the Economic Commission for Africa, the African Development Bank, the World Bank and UNDP. Letters had been sent to all the African countries, and more than half of them had already responded positively. Missions had been sent to identify centres of excellence throughout Africa, in order to create a network of African institutions that would be able to contribute to long-term reflection on the subject. Proposals had been received on possible centres, and on that basis UNDP had developed a regional project to support national initiatives, which had been approved by the steering committee in April 1991. Throughout the process, UNDP had remained in constant contact with the Global Coalition for Africa in Washington, D.C.

49. With the agreement of the Governing Council, UNDP had recruited 22 economists in Africa, and an in-depth evaluation was needed of their functions. Accordingly, UNDP's Central Evaluation Office had just completed the terms of reference for a major evaluation, the conclusions of which would be brought to the Council's attention.

50. The Regional Bureau for Africa would be organizing cluster meetings with planning ministers in July 1991 to discuss a number of African development priorities. HIV/AIDS would be a central issue on the agenda. Approaches to the development of national plans for the environment would be discussed, and countries would share their experiences. The third major item on the agenda would be the development of a long-term consensus on methodology, organization and support needs. The cluster meetings would also address problems of regional cooperation and, lastly, would look at solutions to the problem of maternal mortality, as some 500,000 mothers died each year in Africa during childbirth.

51. Ms. GUERREIRO (Portugal) said that her Government attached great importance to African issues, particularly with regard to programme implementation in the least developed countries, including the five Portuguese-speaking African countries. Portugal contributed 0.23 per cent of its gross national product to official development assistance, almost exclusively to those same five countries. It also supported the African capacity-building initiative and the NaTCAP and round-table processes. To that end, a recent agreement had been signed by Portugal and UNDP, the main objective of which was to support action in the areas of training and national capacity-building, promotion of the private sector and coordination of assistance.

52. Her country also attached great importance to the problem of transport and communications in Africa. In cooperation with the Portuguese-speaking African countries, and in consultation with UNCTAD, Portugal was preparing a Portuguese-speaking training network. Her country was particularly involved in rehabilitating railways in the Southern African Development Coordination Conference (SADCC) region, where international communication was of great importance. Portugal was also preparing a project for Africa on telecommunications.

53. Mr. LOUP (UNDP Coordinator of Assistance to the Least Developed Countries) said that UNDP was studying ways to implement recommendations on its contribution to strengthening the capacity of the least developed countries to coordinate their external assistance. Difficulties persisted in financing the Special Measures Fund for the Least Developed Countries, which was in a desperate situation; its resources for 1991 were extremely limited. If the Fund was not replenished, it would be impossible for it to continue. Ten donor countries had said that the priorities of the least developed countries should be reflected in indicative planning figure (IPF) resources,

(Mr. Loup)

55 per cent of which would go to those countries. While there was agreement on increasing those resources, there was agreement on how that should be done.

54. The PRESIDENT said that if he heard no objection, he would take it that the Council agreed that the Drafting Group should begin to prepare draft decisions on the items just discussed.

55. It was so decided.

OTHER FUNDS AND PROGRAMMES: UNITED NATIONS SUDANO-SAHELIAN OFFICE (DP/1991/45)

56. Mr. BRANNER (Director, United Nations Sudano-Sahelian Office (UNSO)) said that the management of natural resources remained a vital issue in the region and was the prime focus of UNSO activities. UNSO continued to give high priority to assisting Governments in planning, coordinating and monitoring natural resources management.

57. One major activity was UNSO assistance to the countries of the region in preparing for UNCED. As the largest group of countries in Africa experiencing the hardships of recurrent drought, with its associated problems of intensified land degradation and poverty, the Sudano-Sahelian region had a major role to play in that Conference. UNSO represented a unique opportunity for those countries to adopt a common position on the measures necessary to tackle effectively land degradation in arid, semi-arid and sub-humid regions.

58. It would be tempting to say that in view of the magnitude of the problems facing the Sudano-Sahelian countries, the fact that many new organizations had begun to implement programmes of ecological assistance to them could only be welcomed and that even more assistance was needed. There was, however, a limit to the absorption capacity of some Governments, particularly if the assistance was difficult to coordinate or was piecemeal. In order to take effective action, long-term experience of the problems, technologies, methods and approaches relevant to the dryland setting was necessary. UNSO had more than 15 years of experience in the region. It had been the initiator of a number of activities which had had a profound impact on stabilizing the ecosystems of particular areas, activities on which others in the field had subsequently built. In pursuing its basically catalytic role, UNSO had found its status as a flexible fund specialized in a particular geographical area and focused on a specific issue to be an advantage.

59. In coming months, UNSO intended to discuss a long-term strategy with the Sudano-Sahelian countries and the main subregional organizations concerned, as well as with donors and other partners active in the field of natural resources management in dryland areas.

60. Ms. HALVORSEN (Norway), speaking also on behalf of Denmark, Finland and Sweden, said that the Nordic countries appreciated the change that had taken place in UNSO's activities over the past few years. Instead of supporting isolated projects, it was now giving priority to helping Governments plan and coordinate natural resources management. Its abandonment of a narrow project approach in favour of broader and more coherent programmes and its efforts to involve Governments in the fight against desertification were very much in line with the objectives of national execution. Development assistance should be predicated on planning and coordination being done by recipient countries, but in view of the Sahelian countries' economic plight and weak organizational structures the next report from UNSO should elaborate on the lessons learned in that area.

61. UNSO also had an important role to play in preparations for the 1992 Conference on Environment and Development,. It would have been impossible for many developing countries to participate in those preparations without outside assistance. In most of the Sahelian countries, the fight against deforestation, desertification and drought was crucial to sustainable management of land resources.

62. UNSO had played a catalytic role in creating awareness of environmental issues through its assistance in natural resources management and deforestation control. Several organizations were now providing environmental assistance in the Sahel, however, and the need for coordination among them had become pressing; UNSO must therefore redefine its role and determine what its long-term strategy should be when other organizations were doing similar work, often with greater resources. An effort must be made to determine what kind of organizational arrangement would best serve the development and environmental needs of the Sahel region.

63. Mr. RADE (Netherlands) said that, specializing as it did in the protection of natural resources in arid and semi-arid areas in Africa, UNSO was doing more or less the same work as organizations such as the Permanent Inter-State Committee on Drought Control (CILSS), UNEP and the Intergovernmental Authority on Drought and Development (IGADD), but that it had a comparative advantage in that it coordinated all such activities. His delegation wondered, however, whether the region's enormous needs were best met by the current division of activities, in which UNSO seldom took the initiative. Some duplication also seemed to exist, particularly in deforestation control, agro-forestry and natural resources management.

64. All things considered, his delegation would like to ask the UNDP Administration whether it would be desirable to incorporate UNSO into the Regional Bureau for Africa in order to mainstream its activities, wherever necessary, into UNDP general policy for Africa while safeguarding its comparative advantage in natural resources management. It would be only logical for UNDP to continue to build national capacity in Africa with respect to environmental problems and natural resources management, but that did not

(Mr. Rade, Netherlands)

necessarily require keeping UNSO in its current form. Given its regional focus, UNSO's integration into the Regional Bureau for Africa seemed the most suitable approach.

65. Mr. FALL (Observer for Senegal) welcomed the statement by the Director of UNSO and noted that the issues went beyond desertification to soil degradation and poverty in the 22 Sahelian countries. Those countries were increasingly aware of the ecological problems facing them and their Governments were now investing considerable resources in environmental programmes, despite their difficult economic situation.

66. His delegation welcomed the statement made on behalf of the Nordic countries and hoped that UNSO would continue its work on preparations for the Conference on Environment and Development and would help the countries under its mandate with follow-up activities to the Conference.

67. Mr. BORJA DE MOZOTA (France) said that UNSO's autonomy was justified, especially in view of its frequent joint action with UNEP and its cooperation with CILSS and IGADD. Its autonomous role should be reviewed, however, since it needed to maintain close and constructive relations with the two UNDP regional bureaux concerned while avoiding any duplication of effort.

68. Miss JANJUA (Pakistan) welcomed UNSO's assistance to the drought-stricken countries of Africa and recalled that Pakistan too, despite severe resource constraints, had rendered every possible assistance to the countries of the Sahel. Her delegation felt that the anti-desertification drive was very important to the Sahel region but that closer coordination was needed between UNSO and the Permanent Inter-State Committee on Drought Control.

69. Mr. BRANNER (Director, UNSO) said that it was only natural that the Council should ask for more information on the issue of planning and coordination in the next UNSO report; he had tried to explain the growing importance of that issue in his annual report. Planning and coordination was a difficult area and one where UNSO must take advantage of its links with UNDP, so that it could be dealt with at the level of individual countries. UNSO attached importance to its role in helping developing countries prepare for the Conference on Environment and Development.

70. With respect to the comments of the Nordic countries and the Netherlands on the role of UNSO vis-à-vis other agencies and within UNDP, the UNDP Administration felt that it was best for UNSO to keep its present status. The suggestion that there was duplication of effort between UNSO and other agencies such as CILSS and IGADD required clarification. CILSS and IGADD were intergovernmental agencies whose mandate involved regional coordination. UNSO had been created, at the specific request of the Sahelian Governments, to provide liaison with such agencies. There was no duplication of effort.

(Mr. Branner)

71. Replying to the representative of Pakistan, he said that UNSO maintained close contact with both the Permanent Inter-State Committee on Drought Control, which dealt mainly with West Africa, and the Intergovernmental Committee on Drought and Development, which played a similar role in East Africa.

72. The PRESIDENT said that if he heard no objection, he would take it that the Council agreed that the Drafting Group should begin to prepare draft decisions on the item under discussion.

73. It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 5.55 p.m.